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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 003728

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TAGS: PREL PINS KISL RP

SUBJECT: MINDANAO PEACE PROCESS MOVES FORWARD

REF: A. MANILA 3676 (INSURGENT CHAIRMAN MALAYSIAN

FACILITATOR WELCOME USG SUPPORT)

- 1B. MANILA 3509 (GOVERNMENT AND MILF BREAK IMPASSE ON TERRITORY)
- 1C. MANILA 3392 (NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR VIEWS WAY FORWARD)
- 1D. MANILA 3193 (MUSLIM INSURGENTS MULL TERRITORIAL OFFER)
- 1E. MANILA 2509 (MNLF DELEGATION DISCUSSES PEACE PROCESS)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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11. (C) Summary. The Philippine government has made important progress on each side of its dual-track peace discussions with Muslim groups in Mindanao, increasing the likelihood that both sets of talks will return to formal negotiations early in the new year. During preparatory talks in Kuala Lumpur, the Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) agreed on land boundaries for a new Muslim political entity and made significant headway on maritime issues, including joint management of natural resources. The parties also approved extensions of key domestic and international monitoring teams to maintain the current ceasefire. While hopes for a comprehensive peace deal by mid-2008 with the MILF are rising, the parties still have to tackle the difficult issue of governance after the territorial agreement is signed early in the new year. Separately, after two years of delay, the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) sat down in Jeddah for a first round of exploratory tripartite talks with the Organization of Islamic Conference on moving toward full implementation of the 1996 final peace accord. The talks produced agreement to set up working groups and to meet for full-fledged talks in January. Meanwhile, some members of Mindanao's two largest Muslim insurgent groups recognize the importance of harmonizing their respective agreements with the government and are taking the first steps in reaching out to one another for dialogue. End Summary.

MILF Peace Process: Land Boundaries a "Done Deal"

12. (C) The Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) resumed peace negotiations in Kuala Lumpur November 14-15, ending a 14-month impasse over territory. According to government peace panel director Ryan Sullivan, the land-based boundaries for a new Muslim political entity are now "a done deal." In December, the Philippine government will begin engaging local government leaders in areas to be included to sell them on the territorial deal. The proposed new Muslim political entity would be comprised

of Sultan Kudarat Province, with the exception of Tacurong city and three barangays in Isulan city; one-half of Lanao del Norte Province; one-third of the first Congressional district of North Cotabato Province, including Pikit city and parts of Midsayap and Carmen city; Balabac Island in southern Palawan; Sacol Island near Zamboanga City; some barangays in Zamboanga Del Sur and Zamboanga Sibugay Provinces, and all of the existing Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao -- Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi Provinces.

Maritime Issues

¶13. (C) Sullivan said there was an agreement "in principle" to establish maritime boundaries for the new Muslim political entity at 15 kilometers from any coastline, and to place all natural resources within these waters under its jurisdiction.

More detailed proposals for the joint management of natural resources in Philippine waters beyond the 15-kilometer limit will be discussed during the next round of talks in early December, according to Sullivan.

Extensions Approved

¶14. (C) The government and MILF also agreed to extend the tour of duty of the Malaysia-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) until August 2008 and the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group, which coordinates activities against criminals and terrorists, until November 2008, Sullivan said. The monitoring team's peacekeeping mandate was also expanded to include Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan. According to

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a joint statement issued after the talks (text in para 10), Canada would also be added to the monitoring team, but the Canadian embassy here said that no firm decision had been made in Ottawa and much would depend on the prospects for further progress in the peace process.

Governance: An Issue for Formal Talks

¶15. (C) Sullivan described governance of the new Muslim political entity as a complex issue that would be taken up in formal talks during early 2008 after the signing of a "Memorandum of Agreement" on territory. Government negotiators hope to gain Cabinet approval for the final text of the memorandum before the end of December.

MNLF Peace Process: Preparatory Talks Convene

¶16. (C) In another breakthrough, oft-delayed tripartite discussions on the other track of the Mindanao peace process took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, November 10-12 as the Philippine government held preparatory talks with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) on how to fully implement the 1996 final peace accord. The talks took place despite the fact that MNLF chairman Nur Misuri could not attend because his lawyers could not obtain a Saudi guarantee that he would return to Manila by November 13, as required by the Philippine court hearing his trial on sedition charges.

¶17. (C) This introductory round of talks produced agreement on setting up joint Philippine-MNLF working groups on judicial, security, economic, political, and education issues which will seek to clear up differences over implementation of the 1996 peace accord. More importantly, the Philippine government and MNLF agreed to begin formal tripartite talks

beginning January 14, 2008; the talks will likely rotate between Jeddah, Jakarta, Manila, and perhaps other locations. The 11-nation OIC Peace Committee of the Southern Philippines consists of Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan.

MILF Reaching Out to MNLF

¶8. (C) On the eve of the preparatory talks, MILF Deputy Chairman for the Committee on Information Khaled Musa expressed support for full implementation of the 1996 final peace accord. Musa also said that the MILF Central Committee would initiate a dialogue with the factionalized MNLF, commenting that "we are inclusive in case we succeed to sign a peace deal with the government, because the peace deal is not for the MILF alone."

Comment

¶9. (C) The Philippine government faces a very delicate task in calibrating its separate negotiations with the MILF and MNLF. An eventual power sharing arrangement between these two Muslim insurgent groups, as well as local Muslim political leaders, will be vital for peace and security in Mindanao. The resumption of exploratory talks with the MILF, and convening of the oft-postponed tripartite talks in Jeddah, albeit preparatory in nature and without Misuari, were important steps forward in the Mindanao peace process.
End Comment.

Text of Joint Statement

¶10. (SBU) The text of a November 15, 2007, joint statement issued by government and MILF peace panel chairmen Rodolfo ¶C. Garcia and Mohagher Iqbal follows:

The GRP and MILF Peace Panel resumed peace negotiations after a fourteen-month impasse since September 2006. The 14th Exploratory Talks which opened on November 14, 2007, in Kuala Lumpur successfully ended today with the resolution of outstanding issues on the territory strand of the Ancestral Domain aspect.

Building on progress attained during the special meeting last
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October, both sides affirmed all previous points of consensus on the core items of the territory issue, and achieved significant headway in defining key principles relating to maritime domains. The successful outcome of discussions clears the way for the drafting of the memorandum of agreement on Ancestral Domain which will be tabled at the Formal Peace talks scheduled early 2008.

Both sides discussed the current limited tenure of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) and decided to jointly appeal to the Malaysian Government to accede to their request for extension of the tour of duty of the IMT personnel, and expansion of the IMT areas of coverage as earlier agreed.

The appeal was presented by the Chairman of both panels during a brief courtesy call on the Hon. Deputy Prime Minister and concurrent Minister of Defense Dato' Seri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak who responded positively.

Both sides agreed to immediately review the interim guidelines of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG) for a period of one (1) year beginning November 16, 2007.

Both Panels considered and accepted the offer of the

Government of Canada to join the International Monitoring Team.

Both Panels also considered and accepted a proposal of the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines (PCBL) and the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (Foundation Suisse de Deminage - FSD), subject to the final determination of the terms of reference by the Joint Ceasefire Committees.

The panels conveyed their appreciation to H.E. Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi for the Malaysian Government's continued assistance in keeping the peace process on track, and to H.E. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's continued support in pushing forward the Mindanao peace process.

Done on the 15th of November 2007 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Signed by Rodolfo C. Garcia, GRP Panel Chair and Mohagher Iqbal, MILF Panel Chair.

End text.

KENNEY